

Doing Our Part to Conserve Water
Council President Scott Peters, First District
For the La Jolla Light, August 2007

Don't let the cool, cloudy weather and spectacular ocean views fool you, we live in a very arid climate. With an average rainfall of less than 10 inches, we import and pay for nearly 90% of our water from outside the region, so it is vital that we be water wise.

San Diegans have embraced the conservation ethic. We've learned to adjust our landscaping and outdoor water use, take shorter showers, and let our cars get a little dusty. These small personal sacrifices deliver a great reward. Last year, total water usage in San Diego equaled the amount used 15 years ago, although our population has increased by approximately 140,000 since then.

While San Diego is no stranger to hot, dry summers, it is more important than ever that we find ways to reduce our water use. Historic dry conditions, coupled with even greater pressure on our outside water sources, make it essential that the region conserve even more. The largest supplier of San Diego's imported water proposes a double-whammy: higher water rates and a possible 25% decrease in our water allotment.

The City of San Diego Water Department and the County Water Authority recently issued a "20-Gallon Challenge." If each of us can personally conserve 20 gallons of water a day, we can reduce the pressure on the region's water agencies.

Twenty gallons may sound like a lot, but saving that amount of water is relatively easy. Since 60% of urban water use in San Diego comes from landscaping and other outdoor uses, there are a number of ways to reduce wasted water in the yard. Running the sprinklers before 6:00 a.m. and after 8:00 p.m. reduces water evaporation and interference from wind, and can save 20-25 gallons per day. Eliminating one irrigation cycle per week can save up to 250 gallons. Fixing sprinkler heads, sweeping away debris on driveways and walkways, rather than using a hose, can save as much as 20 gallons per minute, and reduce the pollution entering our storm drains.

There are numerous simple ways to reduce your indoor water use as well. Fixing leaky toilets and faucets can save between 15 and 50 gallons per day, as can washing only full loads of laundry. Even something as simple as turning off the water when rinsing dishes and brushing your teeth can save two gallons per minute.

As our region faces higher water rates and reduced supply, we must find new ways to maximize San Diego's water allocation. Conservation is an important first step. Our elected officials must show the vision and leadership needed to implement other water strategies, such as desalination and water recycling. To claim these measures are not needed, or to dismiss them because of fear and misinformation, would be a great disservice to this community and its future.

The City's Water Department offers a number of services and programs aimed at encouraging water conservation. To find out more about the high-efficiency clothes washer voucher program, landscape irrigation calculator and residential water survey program, visit the City's website: www.sandiego.gov/water/conservation.